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A Study in Interpretation

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PREMILLENNIALISM AND OLD TESTAMENT PREDICTION

Conservatives and liberals, using current phraseology, differ greatly from each other in their interpretation of the Bible and especially of Old Testament prediction. But in each of these divisions there are many shades of thought. From the standpoint of interpretation, it seems to me that the premillennial group of the conservative division is particularly interesting to study, both because their views usually show a high degree of unity, and also because this group may fairly be said to belong to the extreme conservatives, so that some of the tendencies of conservative interpretation are here exhibited in an especially clear light. The methods and conclusions of this group, especially from the standpoint of interpretation, are therefore illuminating to those of all varieties of thought. I do not mean to include in this study the most extreme

examples, those who are simply erratic, but rather those who are fairly representative of the general group of the premillennialists. Particularly, no reference is here made to attempts to fix the date of the second coming, because such attempts are repudiated by a large majority of the premillennialists. Reference will be made to a considerable number of books which seem to be representative of the general thought of the premillennialists.

A premillennialist, it may be well to remind ourselves, is one who believes in a millennium, a thousand years of blessedness, before which the second coming of Christ is to take place. In contrast particularly with these are the postmillennialists, who also believe in a millennium, after which Christ is to come again. There are also those who do not believe in a millennium in a definite sense nor in a second coming of Christ in a material sense.

The premillennialists generally profess great devotion to the idea of a literal interpretation of the Old Testament, and in some measure their claim of devotion is justified. Thus W. E. B. (W. E. Blackstone) says: "*There are symbols, figures or tropes, metaphors*, etc., used in Scripture, and there are, also, allegories. But, unless they are so stated in the text, or

plainly indicated in the context, we should hold only to the literal sense. . . . . What is the *purpose of language*, if not to convey definite ideas? Surely the Holy Spirit could have chosen words to convey his thought correctly" (*Jesus Is Coming*, pp. 21–23). This insistence upon literal interpretation, however, is usually only in contrast with a spiritualizing interpretation. What is thus opposed is the spiritualizing interpretation which treats predictions made concerning the Jews as fulfilled in the Christian church.

It should be mentioned that there is a considerable group of premillennialists who do not entirely agree with the picture of premillennialism here set forth. Particularly there are many who believe in a certain amount of spiritualizing interpretation of the Old Testament, which position necessarily somewhat modifies their views in detail. These might perhaps be called the premillennialists of more moderate views, in contrast with the more pronounced premillennialists. From the standpoint of interpretation, these moderates seem to me less consistent than the extremists, their position being essentially that some Old Testament predictions are to be spiritualized and some are not. This more moderate group is not in-

cluded in the statements here made. For the sake of clearness it seems best not to discuss their views in detail, but to confine my attention to the more extreme group which is directly in mind.

There is not infrequently, with these extreme premillennialists, an excessive literalness of interpretation. An extreme case, not often paralleled, is the view of Gen. 13:16, "If a man can number the dust of the earth, then shall thy seed also be numbered," taken by Lord. He interprets this, with no consideration of possible hyperbole, as equivalent to a positive statement that the seed of Abraham shall be as innumerable as the dust of the earth, which will require such a long period of time that it implies "the everlasting existence of the earth and of Canaan, and the endless continuance by successive generations of the Hebrews" (*The Coming and Reign of Christ*, pp. 159, 160). He also insists on a similar conclusion concerning the descendants of David, on the basis of Jer. 33:22 (pp. 173, 174).

In the matter of literal as opposed to allegorical interpretation, there is some degree of variation. But ordinarily there is great freedom in allegorizing, especially in the form of types. Haldeman says: "The twofold order

of the Second Coming is set forth in such typical personal figures as *Enoch*, *Noah*, *Lot*, *Joseph*, *Moses* and *Zipporah*" (*Ten Sermons on The Second Coming*, p. 226). Thus W. E. Blackstone, who proclaims himself so strenuously as in favor of the literal interpretation, interprets allegorically as anti-Christ the king of Dan. 11:36 and Lucifer, or the day-star of Isa. 14:12, "of whom the king of Babylon was a type" (*op. cit.*, p. 109). Gaebelein is especially given to types. Thus he says: "One of the strongest types in the Old Testament foreshadowing Christ, His first and second coming, the salvation He brings for the Gentiles, and finally the blessings for His own who rejected Him, is Joseph. . . . . The famine in the story of Joseph is typical of Israel's suffering yet to come in the great tribulation preceding the day of Jehovah" (*The Harmony of the Prophetic Word*, p. 44). "Edom, concerning which Obadiah had his vision, is a type of the Antichrist" (*ibid.*, p. 81). "The prophet Joel in describing the locust plague which had devastated the land mentions four species of the insect, or rather the locust in its fourfold development, a type again of the four great Gentile powers who were to prey upon Israel's land during the time of their apostasy" (*ibid.*, pp.

57, 58). "Like Christ, so has this wicked one his types, Pharaoh, Saul, Haman, Antiochus Epiphanes, Herod, as well as others, are clear types of these evil ones. We find him and his two associates mentioned throughout prophecy [the reference being to anti-Christ and two associated wicked figures]" (*ibid.*, p. 79). "Agag is the title of the king of Amalek, and Amalek was the grandson of Esau, who appears as Edom in the prophetic Word. They stand for the flesh, and Agag as king stands here for the false king whose end will be when He comes whose right it is" (*ibid.*). "Jonah is a type of Israel, besides being a type of Christ. The whole history of the seed of Abraham, past, present, and future, is contained in a nutshell in that book" (*ibid.*, p. 151).

Again, the related idea of successive fulfilments of prediction, a double or multiple sense of prediction, is a common idea of the premillennialists. Thus Gray holds that the prediction of the destruction of Babylon in Isa. 13: 19–22 was partially fulfilled in the capture of the city by the Persians, but that its adequate fulfilment belongs to the time of the second coming, for which purpose it is yet to be rebuilt. "Possibly what befell Babylon in that day may bear about the same relation to what

will befall it in the day to come as a shadow bears to the substance it precedes" (*Prophecy and the Lord's Return*, pp. 111–13). He also quotes Benjamin Wills Newton as saying: "God is wont in his goodness to give premonitory blows. He is accustomed to warn before he finally destroys. Egypt, Jerusalem, and many other places, have all experienced premonitory desolations; and so has Babylon" (*ibid.*, p. 112). Flynn says: "We can well believe with Lord Bacon that these Old Testament Scriptures 'have infinite springs and streams of doctrine to water the church in every part'—messages of their own for the age in which they were delivered, but deeper meanings, hidden in those times, but opening to us on whom the ends of the world are come" (*Studies on the Second Advent*, p. 12). Gaebelein says: "In the 1st chapter [of Habakkuk] we find a description of the Chaldean army and their invasion. While it is true that such an invasion took place in the past, it is also true that it stands for the coming greater invasion" (*op. cit.*, p. 71). Again: "The little horn in chapter 8 [of Daniel] rises out of the eastern parts of Europe. That Antiochus Epiphanes and his abominations is a partial fulfilment of the little horn seems clear. Anti-

ochus Epiphanes sprung from one of the four kingdoms of Alexander's empire. But he typifies also another person, a little horn which is yet to rise in the northeast" (*ibid.*, p. 91). He apparently has a similar meaning in mind in the following statement: "The entire 103d Psalm stands dispensationally for the praise of restored Israel" (*ibid.*, p. 134).

Ordinarily the premillennialists entirely ignore the historical situations from which the predictions have come. The predictions are treated with a practically complete neglect of the historical background. Passages are interpreted as proof texts, with no thought of historical situation or development of thought.

It results particularly from this ignoring of the historical background, although somewhat also from the other characteristics mentioned, that there is very much forced and arbitrary interpretation. This means that very often details of meaning, based on supposition or assumption, are added to the passage to make it fit a theory. Thus Flynn says: "In the Old Testament references to Messiah are numerous, but in none of them is there any direct allusion to his second advent" (*op. cit.*, p. 11). Nevertheless this writer, as well as the others generally, does not hesitate to find his proofs

for the details of the second coming largely in the Old Testament. In fact, it is often said that there are more predictions of the second coming in the Old Testament than in the New. The following passage from Gaebelein is specially instructive: "The great, final struggle in the land and around Jerusalem is here [in Daniel]. The prophecy of the seventy year-weeks is well known (chapter 9:25–27). Jerusalem's history ends abruptly with the sixty-ninth week. It is, however, not fully ended. One week remains, the seventieth. The gap between the sixty-ninth and the seventieth week is the present age. This is of much importance. The present age, in which God by His Spirit forms the church, the body of Christ, is not a revelation contained in the Old Testament. As soon as this age is concluded, with the fulness of the Gentiles coming in, the completion of the church, Israel's history will begin again. The seventieth week will run its course, and in that week the times *of the Gentiles* will terminate" (*op. cit.*, p. 70). According to Gaebelein, then, and others also, Old Testament prediction has nothing at all to say about the Christian Era. Particularly notable is the arbitrary character of the interpretation which supposes the whole period of

the Christian Era to be passed over in silence between the sixty-ninth and seventieth weeks, with no indication of a gap in the passage itself, this being purely in the interests of a theory concerning the scheme as a whole. This is a device, however, which is quite commonly adopted by premillennialists in the interpretation of this passage. The same idea is expressed rather strikingly by Anderson in the two following passages: "The prophet's glance into the future entirely overlooked these nineteen centuries of our era." "We may conclude, then, that when wicked hands set up the cross on Calvary, and God pronounced the dread 'Lo-ammi' upon His people, the course of the prophetic era ceased to run. Nor will it flow on again till the autonomy of Judah is restored" (*The Coming Prince*, pp. 46, 86). Further, Gaebelein finds predictions of the anti-Christ in many psalms and passages in the prophets. Thus he says: "The 10th psalm contains one of the first descriptions of the Antichrist: 'His mouth is full of cursing, deceit, and oppression; under his tongue is mischief and iniquity.' . . . . Like the 14th, the 53d describes the days of Antichrist in the earth: 'Every one of them is gone back, they are together become corrupt; there is none that

doeth good, not even one.' It is complete apostasy. The 55th psalm also refers to Antichrist: 'He hath put forth his hands against such as are at peace with him; he hath broken his covenant' " (*op. cit.*, pp. 80, 81). In Ezek. 28:1–8 Gaebelein finds six "signs and marks of the Antichrist" and goes on to say: "It is the number 'six,' and as we have his number in Revelation 666—three sixes, meaning man in full opposition to God. We have, therefore, under the type of the prince of Tyre a perfect outline of the man of sin" (*ibid.*, p. 86). By premillennialists generally Old Testament predictions concerning God are applied to Christ with entire freedom, it being apparently at the option of each one whether he interprets these passages of God or of Christ. It is quite in accord with this custom that Gaebelein says: "The glorious manifestation of Jehovah-Jesus, and his righteous judgment, will last for a thousand years" (*ibid.*, p. 37), this term "Jehovah-Jesus" being a favorite with him.

In reference to methods of interpretation, therefore, so far as the premillennialists insist upon one form of literal interpretation, they are partly right but push the matter to a rigid, mechanical excess. All their other ideas of interpretation, however, seem to be largely

wrong, antiquated, in accordance with the methods of an earlier age. They give the impression of being honest in purpose, desirous of the truth, but of having no actual conception of what real interpretation is. They are facing a large task, with no clear idea either of the nature of the task or of their own equipment. It is paleolithic man with his stone axes trying to build a twentieth-century skyscraper. And it is doubtless the case that they regard scientific interpretation as a matter of no real importance, and this because of their insistence upon a very rigid view of inspiration, which takes little account of anything except the divine author, thus making the human writers for the most part passive. Their thought, expressed as an assumption and as such not given much discussion, is that the whole Bible is infallible, sometimes stated in terms of verbal inspiration, and always having essentially that significance. Thus Scofield says: "The writers of Scripture invariably affirm, where the subject is mentioned by them at all, that the *words* of their writings are divinely taught. . . . . The revealed things are communicated in Spirit-taught words" (*Reference Bible*, p.1213). The same writer also says: "Though He employs many penmen, God alone is the Author

of the prophetic testimony" (Foreword to Gaebelein, *op. cit.*, p. 7). Gaebelein says: "The harmony which exists throughout the Bible, from Genesis to Revelation, is one of the strongest arguments for the plenary inspiration of the Scriptures. The unity which we find here is supernatural; it is divine. The inspired writers of the Bible cover a period of almost two thousand years, living in so many different ages and under different circumstances, yet all agree perfectly, and there is no clash of opinions. Such unity is a miracle. No human genius could produce it. There is nothing like it in all the literary products of men, and there will be nothing like it in the future. *God* spake at sundry times and in divers manners (Heb. 1:1), and therefore all in this precious book being God-breathed (2 Tim. 3:16), must be a perfect, infallible whole. What an awful sin to criticise the Bible, to deny its inspiration, to put the Word of God which He has exalted above all His Name upon the same level with profane literature" (*ibid.*, p. 11). Further: "The prophet Ezekiel is but little studied as a book. Like every other book in the Bible, it has perfect order" (*ibid.*, p. 31). He says further: "No prophet 'imitated' another; each wrote as moved by

the Holy Spirit" (*ibid.*, pp. 25, 26). Also: "Habakkuk did *not* borrow, as some have said, from the description of the manifestation of Jehovah when He gave the law, or from other prophets, but the Spirit of God gives through him the same testimony concerning this great event as He did through His other chosen instruments" (*ibid.*, p. 109). Here the use of human means, the influence of one writer upon another, an obvious view, is explicitly denied, although without proof, in favor of the view of a directly supernatural origin.

The whole attitude of mind of the premillennialists is one which takes little account of questions of probability, magnifies greatly the element of the wonderful and miraculous, proceeds from the old view that it honors God to regard things as done by extraordinary means rather than by ordinary, and commonly ignores human instrumentality. "Let us also notice that the outcasts of *Israel* will be assembled then, and the dispersed of *Judah* gathered [as predicted in Isa. 11:11, 12]. Those who returned from the Babylonian captivity were only Jews. Israel and Judah will be regathered and reunited in that day. It is a vain speculation to try and find the so-called ten lost tribes now. The Anglo-Israel theory is un-

scriptural and a delusion. The Lord knows where the whole house of Israel and the house of Judah is, and He will bring them all back" (*ibid.*, p. 139). Here the great improbability of the return of the ten tribes has no weight; it is sufficient to think that the Lord knows where they are and will produce them when needed. Similarly Scofield says: "Speaking broadly, the dispersion of the ten tribes, (Ephraim-Israel) still continues; nor can they now be positively identified. They are, however, preserved distinct from other peoples and are known to God as such, though they themselves, few in number, know Him not" (*op. cit.*, pp. 529, 530). Similarly, Gray thinks, and others with him, that the capital of the great wicked empire, the last world-monarchy, is to be Babylon. This idea is based on Isa. 13:19–22, on the ground that, while this passage had a partial fulfilment in the overthrow of Babylon by the Persians, nevertheless that fulfilment is not adequate, and so there must be a further, sufficient fulfilment (*op. cit.*, pp. 111–13). The great improbability of this is not considered.

No supposition is too improbable if it is needed to solve a difficulty. According to the views of some premillennialists, during the

millenium Jesus and the church will be in heaven but they will also be reigning over the earth. The difficulty that they seem to be in two places at the same time is solved by Gaebelein by the supposition that at that time Mount Zion will be so elevated that it will form a connection between earth and heaven. "The time for its fulfilment [John 1:51] will be when Jehovah-Jesus is king, and then there shall be a wonderful intermingling of the heavenly and the earthly, a glorious intercourse between the Jerusalem above and Jesusalem in the earth, and the ladder, so to speak, will be Mount Zion. The Lord, the King, will reign and manifest His glory in Jerusalem; His glorious rest and throne is over Jerusalem, in the heavenlies. In Jerusalem will stand the throne of David, and it is the Lord's throne, but there will also be a vice-regent [*sic;* "vice-gerent" is apparently meant] of Christ in the earth, a lineal descendant of David, who will occupy the throne of Jehovah-Jesus" (*op. cit.*, p. 169). The most elementary teachings of science are ignored. Gaebelein says: "Turning to the 11th chapter [of Isaiah] we find still more here. Groaning creation is delivered from the curse resting upon it now and restored to its normal Edenic condition. There

is no warrant whatever to spiritualize these familiar words, 'The wolf shall also dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid, and the calf and the young lion and the fatted beast together,' etc. (11:6–10). These words mean what they say. When the first Adam with his helpmeet stood in the garden all creation was subjected to them: neither did the leopard spring upon the kid to tear it to pieces. Sin, coming in, changed all" (*ibid.*, p. 197).

The whole attitude of these writers is controversial, but usually not objectionably so. Postmillennialism is the opponent principally in mind. But opposing views are not often directly attacked. Passages similar to the following are occasionally found: "It will be seen from this prophecy [Joel 2:28, 29] that the fulfilment of this passage falls into the time of Israel's restoration. Persons who apply it to the present age make havoc of God's purposes and often drift into fanciful teachings or even delusions" (*ibid.*, p. 135).

The premillennial view of the fulfilment of prediction is of great importance in this scheme of thought. That view is exceedingly definite and intelligible. It starts from the dogmatic assumption already mentioned that

the whole Bible is infallible. The predictions of the Old Testament prophets, then, being infallible, must all be fulfilled at some time, aside from the possible supposition of a conditional element which is not, however, very much employed. On the literal view, as opposed to the spiritualizing, it is maintained that most of these predictions have not been fulfilled up to the present time. Hence, they must inevitably be fulfilled in the future. But they are so remote from present conditions that the fulfilment is generally transferred to the time of the second coming. If one starts with their presuppositions the conclusion is logical.

The result of this is that the whole representation of the second coming is given a Judaistic cast. Apparently this is not ordinarily because of Judaistic sympathies, but as a necessary result of this view of the infallibility of the Old Testament.

The nature of the kingdom to be established after the second coming of Christ is to be that of a political, material world-empire, of which the Jewish nation shall be the head, with Jerusalem as the capital, as predicted by the Old Testament prophets of the Exile and after the Exile. This is apparently the uni-

versal opinion of premillennialists. It is the general opinion, also, that the temple shall be rebuilt and the bloody sacrifices of the Jews re-established, perhaps in a somewhat modified form. The Jews at this time accept Christ as the Messiah, who becomes their king, and they continue to keep forever their position as the chosen nation of special privilege. The Christian church thus becomes really subordinate to the Jewish nation. At the same time some, at any rate, of the saints, apparently meaning Christians, are given positions of authority. These ideas are expressed in quotations which follow. The church "is like a parenthesis in God's dealing with his people, Israel" (W. E. Blackstone, *op. cit.*, p. 202). Scofield says: "Israel is always the center of the divine counsels earthward" (*op. cit.*, p. 722). Also: "The Christian is of the heavenly seed of Abraham (Gen. 15:5, 6; Gal. 3:29), and partakes of the spiritual blessings of the Abrahamic Covenant; . . . . but Israel as a nation always has its own place, and is yet to have its greatest exaltation as the earthly people of God" (*ibid.*, p. 1204). Imbrie says: "No sin or defection in Israel will ever involve any irrecoverable or final rejection of the nation" (*Premillenial Essays*, p. 14, this being

on the basis of Jer. 31:35–38). He also says that Israel is "recognized as God's appointed channel for bringing in the day of blessing to all the earth" (*ibid.*, p. 127). Lord says: "All these predictions of the Messiah's reign thus contemplate the continuance through eternal ages of the Israelites as a people, and his rule over them on the throne of David, as their special monarch, in distinction from other nations" (*op. cit.*, pp. 174, 175). He also says: "The saints of the Most High who are to possess the kingdom, are, the prophecy teaches, the saints whom the little horn had worn out and slaughtered through a long succession of ages; and, as is shown in the vision in the Apocalypse of the first resurrection, are risen and glorified saints; and therefore, as they are all to be kings unto God and Christ, and are to reign with him, the subjects over whom they are to reign are indubitably the people, nations, and tongues, over whom Christ is to receive dominion" (*ibid.*, p. 177). Again: "It will be a new and peculiar administration, because the saints of the Most High are to take the kingdom along with Christ, and reign with him for ever and ever. The saints . . . . are thus to receive judicial authority and to possess the kingdom" (*ibid.*, p. 219). "He

[Christ] is to reign here and visibly, not as he now does in a distant part of the universe beyond the sphere of our sight" (*ibid.*, p. 218). Gray says: "In fulfilment of that promise [found in Gen. 12 according to his statement, but Gen. 13:15 is evidently meant] the Jew is going back to Palestine; at first in an unconverted state, so far as his acceptance of Jesus as his Messiah is concerned. When Israel thus goes back, she will rebuild her temple, and essay to worship the God of her fathers. . . . . Then it is [after acceptance of Jesus as the Messiah] that Israel takes up the broken threads of privilege and duty where she laid them down so long ago, the threads of testimony and witness to Jehovah, her Messiah, and her Savior as well as ours. And then it is that through her testimony the nations of the earth, in the millennial age, shall be brought at last into obedience to the Son of God" (*op. cit.*, pp. 117, 118). G. Campbell Morgan says: "Jerusalem is to be rebuilt, and will possess a temple far larger and more magnificent than before, the size of which is given by Ezekiel. The city will not merely be the seat of rule exercised over Israel; but the metropolis of government for the world-wide worship of God. In the past its sacrifices and oblations

pointed on to Christ; but these, restored in the Millennium, will be offered in memory of the work which Jesus accomplished by his cross" (*God's Methods with Man*, pp. 117, 118, quoted in Snowden, *The Coming of the Lord*, p. 216). He says again: "Jesus will be king, in as direct and positive sense as any ruler the world has ever known, but with larger empire and more autocratic sway" (*ibid.*, p. 115). W. E. Blackstone says: "The temple and the city are rebuilt after the divine plan; and the Levitical sacrifices and form of worship are with some modifications re-established" (*op. cit.*, p. 191). Gaebelein says: "In Jerusalem will stand a marvelous temple, which will be a house of prayer for all nations, and there an elaborate ritual will be kept. Nations and representatives of nations will come up to keep the feast of tabernacles" (*op. cit.*, p. 189). The restoration of the bloody sacrifices is based especially upon Ezek. 45:21–25; Isa. 66:20, 23; Zech. 14:16. This is logically a part of the belief of premillennialists, and, while occasionally disavowed, it is accepted by nearly all (see the statements by Snowden, *op. cit.*, pp. 205–17).

The teaching of premillennialism is that the Kingdom of God was not established by Jesus

during his earthly ministry, it is not now in the world, and it is only to be established after the second coming. The means of the establishment of the Kingdom are Jewish means, being taken from the Old Testament predictions. "Conquest by catastrophe and cataclysm brought about by physical force was the program of Judaism. And this is the program of premillennarianism" (*ibid.*, p. 204). It is a world-empire, material in character, with the Jews at the head, based upon material force. Jesus is to be the king over this empire, but the actual administration seems usually to be represented as largely in the hands of others. Thus Gaebelein says, in a passage already quoted: "There will also be a vice-regent of Christ in the earth, a lineal descendant of David, who will occupy the throne under Jehovah-Jesus" (*op. cit.*, p. 169).

Such is the general outline of the features of the future Kingdom of God as expected by premillennialists; it is Judaistic and material. It is in all essential particulars a re-establishment of Judaism, and naturally, because it is based largely on Old Testament predictions. Is this a probable future? It is out of accord with all the tendencies of modern life, and therefore could not be established by historical

evolution. This is, by implication, granted, but it is asserted that it is to be brought about by a cataclysm or a series of cataclysms. Is this likely? In fact, is it desirable? It is a rule of force; Jesus himself is transformed into a tyrannical ruler. It is un-Christian. The restored supremacy of the Jew is a survival of the chosen nation idea which is out of harmony with the Christian thought of equal opportunity of blessing for all mankind. This is Judaism in its narrower sense; it is out of accord with the higher ideals of Judaism. The acts attributed to God and Christ are in many details un-Christian, as will be seen more fully later. The material kingdom is out of harmony with the spiritual Kingdom which Jesus came to establish. This is the law, not the gospel.

It seems to me that perhaps the most serious defect of the teachings of the premillennialists, partly included and implied in what has already been said, is the confusion of their ethical standards. Their ethical teachings and implications are below the level of the teachings of Christianity, i.e., they are un-Christian. In general these writers glorify monarchy, an idea which is out of accord with modern interpretations of Christianity. Haldeman says: "Thus the clay in the image is a

picture of *democracy*. *Gold* represents *monarchy*, is the first in order in the state, and sets forth that form of government which is directly from the hand of God. . . . . The clay is the last form of rule, is the result of the overthrow and departure from the previous forms of monarchy and is the farthest away from the direct ordination of God" (*op. cit.*, pp. 540, 541). So also Gray: "When it is said, furthermore, that 'after thee shall arise another kingdom inferior to thee,' the reference being to that of the Medes and Persians, we are not to suppose that its inferiority meant that it had less military power or territorial expansion. The opposite was true. . . . . It was inferior in the character of its government. It was a limited monarchy, while the government of Nebuchadnezzar was an absolute monarchy. In the mind of God, the ideal government is not a democracy but an absolute monarchy, only the monarch must be holy and righteous, knowing and doing the will of God" (*op. cit.*, pp. 103, 104).

It is a common statement that peace can come only through war, a declaration hardly tending to the encouragement of the Christian virtues. Thus Haldeman says: "*It is an absolute crime to go out and deceive people with*

the talk about peace; to tell them there will be no conflict between capital and labor; that nation will not war against nation; that through the preaching of the Gospel and the evolution of national and social righteousness peace, wide, universal and abiding peace, is coming. . . . . In other words war, war universal, war engaging and devastating all nations must come before peace; that the only threshold over which the nations can cross into peace is war—war, bloody, fearful, full of slaughter and anguish" (*op. cit.*, pp. 586, 587).

The things attributed to God and Christ often seem immoral. So far as God is concerned, this is principally a result of the insistence on the infallibility of the Old Testament, which logically requires a justification of immoral acts there attributed to God. For example, the imprecatory psalms play a prominent part in the premillennial system, and their use is approved by the premillennialists. Thus Gray says: "The imprecatory psalms were written for Israel's comfort, though the Gentile nations (and all of us individually) may draw such comfort from them as is possible, for in some degree they are *applicable to all men when they turn from sin to God.* Nevertheless, the imprecations are to fall upon the Gen-

tile nations in that day, when they shall be gathered against Israel once more returned to her own land" (*op. cit.*, p. 94). Again he says: "It is at this crisis [when the Gentiles are besieging Jerusalem], if our interpretation be correct, that the imprecatory psalms find their complete fulfilment, and for that day the peace of the world still waits" (*ibid.*, p. 98). Scofield says that the imprecatory psalms are "appropriate and right in the earthly people of God" (*op. cit.*, p. 599). These treatments of the imprecatory psalms make God responsible for the curses and give them a special place in the time of the second coming. A curious use of these psalms is that of Gaebelein, who says: "The imprecatory prayers, calling down God's wrath upon the enemies, are then in order [i.e., to be used by the Jews at the time of the great tribulation], and will be answered by the majestic appearing of the heavenly King. This is the only satisfactory key to these imprecatory psalms, which call on God to destroy the enemies. Christians cannot use them, for we are to pray for our enemies. The pious Jews living in that time of trouble will utter these words" (*op. cit.*, p. 46). That is, the distinction of right and wrong is not based upon anything inherent in the character of God or

in the constitution of things, but is arbitrary, depending simply upon a direct command of God. It is not right for Christians to use these horrible imprecations, because they have been commanded to love their enemies; but it is all right for Jews, even pious Jews, because this command has not been laid upon them. It is a curious case of ethical confusion.

Arbitrary dealings of God with humanity are frequent. Thus Haldeman says that at the beginning of the epoch of the Great Tribulation there will be such an act. "The Holy Ghost will be taken out of the world as the convicting and restraining power of evil. . . . . The Holy Spirit will be taken away. That is to say, He will personally depart as an official and restraining power. The world will be given over to the unhindered working of the Satanic spirit" (*op. cit.*, pp. 581, 582). Thus at this period, according to Haldeman, God makes it impossible for anyone on earth to do his will.

One can hardly resist the conclusion that Christ is represented as immoral when he is pictured as a tyrant ruling with all possible severity. Here again this is partly because of the rigid dogmatic view of the Old Testament. Ps. 2:9 is a favorite quotation, this being applied to the relation of Christ to the nations at

his second coming: "Thou shalt break them with a rod of iron; thou shalt dash them in pieces like a potter's vessel." This idea is presented with special emphasis by Haldeman. Even when due allowance is made for rhetorical emphasis, it does not seem possible to regard the picture here presented as anything else than an immoral monstrosity substituted for Christ the Savior. Here are some quotations in reference to the time of judgment in connection with the second coming: "*He comes forth as a warrior.* . . . . . Now the era of peace is over, it is the moment of war, and as 'the Man of War' He goeth forth to the prey. The whole figure is full of anticipated conflict and battle. . . . . He comes forth as one who no longer seeks either friendship or love; as one who is self-contained in His masterfulness and royal in His independence of men. . . . . Now He will enunciate His claim by terror and might. He will write it in the blood of his foes. . . . . His kingdom will not be a kingdom of grace but a kingdom of strict righteousness and justice; his sceptre will not be the gold of refinement and polished rest, but the iron of rule, of hardness and unyielding severity. . . . . *He treadeth the winepress of the fierceness and wrath of Almighty God.* Behold

the cloudless skies of Palestine! The hills are vine-clad and the purple grapes gleam in the golden sun. They gather the grapes, great clusters, wonderful clusters from the vines of the earth and cast them into the winepress that waits them, till the press is full. And lo! the treader of the winepress! He leaps upon the piled-up beauty of grapes. He tramples them beneath his feet with wild delight, and the rounded grapes are broken, the crimson hearts break and the flood pours forth like blood, blood from veins and arteries of men; and the red stain covers His feet, until they sink and sink in the reddening, deepening tide; and the stain is on all His garments. He laughs, he shouts, he sings, and they come to him with laughing lips and arms that are heaped, fair, yet sun-browned girls, and boys like sculptured, olden gods, and men, and the press is full; still the treader waves his hands, he shouts, he laughs and sings and ever cries, 'More, bring me more, the press is not yet full.' With redoubled fury he treads and tramples the helpless things till they fling up their beating life in his face. Now his face! look at it! it is stained and streaked. He is a picture of blood. And the wine of this blood makes him mad and drunken in fury. He

tramples and he treads till the vats below are full of the crimson stream. Thus will He, the Christ of God, come forth. He will come to tread in the winepress. That winepress! the land of the cloudless sky and the vineclad hills. The grapes, the bodies of men, gathered from the 'vine of the earth,' that vine that would imitate the true vine of God, that wicked and unspeakable thing of the Devil, his system, his kingdom and masterpiece of lies. And He will trample them in His fury. . . . . It is the winepress of the fierceness and wrath of Almighty God. He will tread and trample in His fury till the blood of men shall fill the earth as the juice of the grape the overflowing vats. He will tread and trample them beneath His accusing feet, till their upspurting blood shall make Him crimson. . . . . He comes to His glory not as the Savior, meek and lowly, not through the suffrage of willing hearts and the plaudits of a welcoming world, but as a king, an autocrat, a despot, through THE GUSHING BLOOD OF A TRAMPLED WORLD. Think of it! He comes from Heaven. He rises up from the joy and gladness of the marriage feast, from the fellowship of love, of tenderness and grace, and descends swiftly to earth that HE MAY TRAMPLE IT BENEATH HIS FEET IN FURY" (*The Coming of*

Christ, Premillennial and Imminent, pp. 250–57).

The principal conclusions of the premillennialists, then, offer themsleves for testing along practical lines. The picture of the future which they give is Judaistic, material, un-Christian. The presentation of human relations and of the character of God and Christ is immoral, therefore un-Christian. But these un-Christian features are not incidental or accidental; they are a consistent and logical result of the general scheme of interpretation of the Old Testament predictions. If the result is thus un-Christian, that fact indicates a defect in the scheme at some point. This suggests, indeed, that the attitude toward Old Testament prediction is wrong, in some particulars or altogether. The various elements in this attitude, as stated substantially earlier, are that the Old Testament predictions give an infallible program of the future and hence must be fulfilled at some time; that most of them have not been fulfilled up to the present time; that, consequently, all these must be fulfilled in the future, the only possible time seeming to be in connection with the second coming of Christ, which, however, is not derived at all from the Old Testament but only

from the New. The second point, that most of the predictions of the Old Testament have not been fulfilled in any literal sense, seems to me to be correct, and is in accord with the opinion of most interpreters. The difficulty, then, must lie in the other elements, which go together. If the conclusion is wrong, then, it seems evident that it is not true that the Old Testament predictions present God's definite program of the future which must be fulfilled.

In order that the conclusion of this discussion may not be simply negative, however, it seems desirable to add a further statement. The real alternative to the premillennial view of the Old Testament predictions, it seems to me, is one which is also consistent in itself but which starts from an entirely different conception of the nature of Old Testament prediction. This view is that such prediction is not infallible, that it presents the prophetic expectation and ideal embodying the ideas of the prophets based upon their very real fellowship with God, containing some phases which are universal, permanent, Christian, but with definite limitations due to the general circumstances and thought of the times. The prophetic expectation was that these predictions would be realized in the near future, and they

were based upon conditions and ideas then prevailing. Most of them have not been fulfilled. Those that have not been fulfilled never will be and never can be, because conditions have so much changed. Their fulfilment, in fact, would not be a blessing but a misfortune, because the ideal is in many respects un-Christian. Hence, these predictions give no information for the time yet future. The true ideal for the future is not Judaistic and material but Christian and spiritual.

This may be put somewhat more fully. The most obvious value of the Old Testament predictions is in relation to their own times. A prediction was primarily a message addressed to the conditions of its own age, intended to be of value directly to that time. The predictions concerning the future of Israel embodied the highest ideals of the prophets for the coming age of humanity. As such, they served in their own period a very helpful purpose in keeping alive national expectation and impressing national ideals upon the consciousness of the Jewish people. This was an actual contribution to the progress of humanity, inasmuch as it gave to the Jews higher ideals of the future than they would otherwise have had. These predictions were the embodiment

of ideas which were among the forces making for progress. From the standpoint of the thought of their own day, therefore, they were forward-looking messages.

From the standpoint of our day, however, these ideas are often defective. They have frequently a narrow nationalism, which is out of accord with a regard for universal humanity. They are usually autocratic and militaristic, contemplating the holding of other nations in subjection to the Jews by force, while the highest ideals of the present day are democratic and peaceful. Further, they are largely material, while the present ideals are more fully spiritual. In such predictions the value for the present day is largely historical.

Some, but comparatively few, of the Old Testament predictions show a different attitude. These are permeated by a universal spirit—in other words, they are fully Christian. Such is the ideal of the suffering servant in the Servant of Yahweh songs, an interpretation of the experiences of Israel, idealized, during the Exile, along with predictive elements (Isa. 52:13—53:12 and elsewhere), which has the very spirit of Christ. Hear the majestic description of the servant in his vicarious suffering: "He was despised, and rejected

of men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief; and as one from whom men hide their face he was despised; and we esteemed him not. Surely he hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows; yet we did esteem him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted. But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and Yahweh hath laid on him the iniquity of us all" (53:3–6). From this is to come the triumphant exaltation. "He shall see of the travail of his soul and shall be satisfied; by the knowledge of himself shall my righteous servant justify many; and he shall bear their iniquities" (53:11). "Behold my servant shall deal wisely, he shall be exalted and lifted up, and shall be very high" (52:13). Such also is the very remarkable utterance of Isa. 19:23–25: "In that day shall there be a highway out of Egypt to Assyria, and the Assyrian shall come into Egypt, and the Egyptian into Assyria; and the Egyptians shall worship with the Assyrians. In that day shall Israel be the third with Egypt and with Assyria, a blessing in the midst of the earth; for that Yahweh of

hosts hath blessed them, saying, Blessed be Egypt my people, and Assyria the work of my hands, and Israel mine inheritance." Here democracy in religion finds unusual expression. There are also frequent utterances in the predictions of the prophets which are of universal character because based on ethical monotheism.

On this modern historical view, then, the value of the Old Testament predictions rests upon their essential nature, not as infallible statements of a program for the future, but as the presentation of ideals embodying the religious ideas of the prophets. As ideals, they were of varied character and had their place in the progressive development of Old Testament thought. At their highest points their teachings concerning God and man are the same as those of the New Testament, but they cannot be regarded as being entirely on the same level as the fuller and more adequate statements of Christian truth in the New Testament. If, as I believe, the Christian ideal is the highest that man knows, no inferior ideal should be allowed to take its place. "God is love"—that culmination of Old Testament thought is the essence of the Christian teaching, the supremacy of which cannot properly be challenged by any lesser message.

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